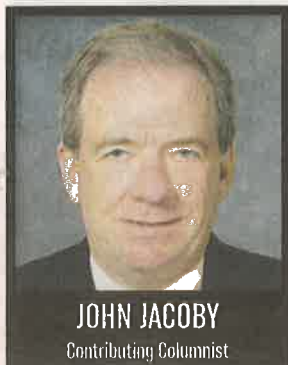


## A WORD FROM THE (FORMER) PRESIDENT

## Kindergarten options revisited



**JOHN JACOBY**  
Contributing Columnist

Wilmette School District 39 remains undecided on the question of extending the kindergarten day by offering either an “enrichment” program or a “full day” program. Meanwhile, the Winnetka School District is implementing an enrichment program in the fall of 2017. This

leaves D39 as one of the few school districts in the area, indeed in the entire State, to offer only a half-day program. (Avoca and Kenilworth both offer enrichment programs.) Should D39 residents be concerned? Are D39 youngsters being denied an important educational experience and being placed at a competitive disadvantage? Will young couples moving from the City look elsewhere?

D39 Superintendent Ray Lechner, in a 2015 report, laid out two options for an extended kindergarten day. One is a “tuition-based enrichment option” that would extend the school day for up to one-half day and

would require the parents of enrollees to pay a fee to cover the program’s cost. The second is a “full-day option” that would be available to the entire kindergarten population at no cost to parents. Under either approach, half-day kindergarten would still be offered as an option.

D39 kindergarten teachers agree that more class time would benefit the kids. According to Dr. Lechner, “We can deliver the curriculum we need to in half a day, but it’s a packed morning or afternoon.” The additional time would be spent on projects and activities that enrich the existing curriculum and would provide greater opportunity for play and

socialization. Moreover, full-time teachers are now responsible for about forty students in two half-day sessions. In an expanded program, they’d be responsible for only about twenty students in one session. Spending more time with fewer students would give teachers a greater opportunity to observe and assess kids’ performance and communicate with parents.

Many parents already supplement the existing half-day program by enrolling their children in an enrichment program offered by a private preschool or Wilmette Park District. An expanded D39 program would eliminate the need to move these kids from one location to

another and would provide instructional continuity. Parents (especially working parents) regard these as significant benefits.

On the other hand, the benefits of an expanded program are debatable. While these programs clearly have significant educational value in districts with lower socioeconomic demographics, there’s no research proving their value in places like Wilmette. D39 kids perform as well in upper grades as kids who have attended the enrichment programs offered by Kenilworth and Avoca. And parents who want their kids to have the experience of an enrichment program already have

excellent options offered by private pre-schools and the Park District. (St. Joseph’s School offers a full-day kindergarten program.) Dr. Lechner is sensitive to the impact that an expanded D39 kindergarten would have on these programs and adds, “If we’re going to make a change, we have to be sure we can sustain it.”

Not to be forgotten is the additional burden that an expanded kindergarten program would place on taxpayers. Either an enrichment program or a full-day program would entail significant financial costs. At present, none of the four D39 grade

Please see **JACOBY, 27**

# gets old

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## JACOBY

*From Page 26*

schools has the two ad-  
 ditional classrooms per  
 school that would be  
 needed, and providing the  
 additional space would  
 require an expenditure of  
 more than \$4 million. The  
 full-day option would  
 require taxpayers to bear  
 significant additional  
 operating costs for in-  
 creased teaching staff and  
 materials.

D39 has deferred action  
 for now and is monitor-  
 ing enrollment and other  
 factors to determine the  
 feasibility of expanded  
 kindergarten in the future.  
 In my opinion, this is the  
 proper approach. Condi-  
 tions aren't right at this  
 time for an expanded  
 program, especially given  
 the uncertainty over State  
 funding of education.  
 And the advantages of an  
 expanded kindergarten  
 program must be weighed  
 against other costly com-  
 munity needs like sewers.